



INTRODUCING

THE GOSPEL

Introducing the Bible





Lesson 3: Introducing the Bible

Introduction

The Bible is the core book on which real Christianity is based. For Christians, the Bible provides the foundation of a real understanding of God. To understand God and his message, we must study the Bible, and that means we must have some idea of what it is and where it came from.

The Bible as a whole book is made up of a collection of smaller books. There are 66 of these books; each is a separate work in its own right and is independent of the other books. The books have names, sometimes named after the writer, and sometimes named after the recipient. For example, Amos is a book written by a prophet - someone who was inspired by God to pass on a message about the future - called Amos. But the book called Romans is a letter written by a man called Paul to a congregation of believers in Rome to encourage them and help them solve problems.

Each book was written by a writer who intended that book to stand on its own, but there are many themes which run throughout the Bible and reappear in many books.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How the Bible came together over 1,400 years
- Some historical, archaeological and textual evidence which supports the Bible's claims
- Why the Bible's unified message is remarkable



How the Bible was written

Different books of the Bible were written by different people, however these writers have several features in common. Look at this passage from the Apostle Peter in one of his letters:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

2 Peter 1:16

This passage makes the point that the writers of the Bible were eyewitnesses of the events they describe. There is great emphasis on the eyewitness nature of the writings throughout the New Testament, whereas the Old Testament books were written by the prophets themselves.

Even more importantly, the writers of the Bible were inspired by God. This means that the message of the books they wrote is from God, and that the wording of the Bible is what God intends. There are many places where the writers of the Bible made this claim; here is one from that letter of Peter’s that we looked at a moment ago:

“Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

2 Peter 1:20-21

This part of the letter makes the point that the words of the prophets originate with God. Shortly, we will have a brief look at some Bible prophecies and what makes them so special. But for now, the most important point is that every word of the Bible was written by a prophet inspired by God.

The Bible is the only book that can make this claim. No other book, not even the scriptures of other religious traditions, can make this claim.



Evidence which supports the Bible's claims

The Bible can make the claim to be an accurate record of events and teachings, and to be inspired by God. Here, we will give a brief overview of some of the evidence, although in itself this could fill many pages in full!

Evidence from archaeology

The Bible describes events, people, places and customs in the ancient world. Many of these have left no trace, but a few have left physical evidence behind in the ground which has been uncovered by archaeologists.

Some of this is found in early evidence of the nation of Israel in Canaan from about 1,200BC onwards, and the amount of archaeological detail increases tremendously for the later parts of history, with great detail matching up between historical sources and the Bible especially around the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of Judah in around 700 and 600BC.

The events in the Old Testament often involve battles, the destruction of cities by invading armies, and major political figures who left monuments and inscriptions to record their deeds.

The New Testament by comparison describes events over a much shorter period of time, and of individuals who were far from power. Despite this, there is strong archaeological confirmation for events in the New Testament, from architectural details of buildings to minor details of ancient life in Judea and Galilee.

Explore the archaeological evidence in more detail: bit.ly/biblethinkarchaeology

Evidence from undesigned coincidences

An undesigned coincidence is a situation in which accounts of events from different authors contain seemingly insignificant details. When the details are compared with one another, they are found to correspond, at a level which would be impossible to forge or corroborate at a later date.

One example is a miracle where Jesus fed five thousand men, plus an unknown number of women and children using only a tiny amount of food. The event is recorded in all four Gospels,



and there are a number of insignificant details which correspond across these four accounts from four different writers.

Let's take a look at one of these details involving some grass. Mark's account of the event notes:

"Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass."

Mark 6:39

And John's account says:

"Now, there was much grass in the place."

John 6:10

The grass is not essential to the narrative - Luke doesn't even mention it. But this detail, although insignificant, also shows the reliability of the account. In the area where the miracle took place near Bethsaida, grass doesn't grow until the spring; at the end of April it dries up and goes brown, unless irrigated. This means that there would only be green grass on the ground at around the time of the Passover - typically in March or April.

Look then at this detail from John's account of the same miracle:

"Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand."

John 6:4

The details correspond exactly. It would be very difficult for a writer to invent or coordinate this kind of detail. The fact that these fit together is excellent evidence that the accounts are detailed and accurate. There are thousands more links across the Bible that demonstrate that this is not simply the work of humans.

Explore undesigned coincidences in more detail: bit.ly/biblethinkcoincidences

Evidence of unity of message

The Bible was written by more than 40 different writers over a period of more than 14 centuries in three different languages. The writers came from many backgrounds: Amos was a peasant farmer, David was a shepherd who became a king, Nehemiah was a civil servant and Ezekiel



was a priest. In the New Testament, we have writers like John who had been a partner in a fish business, Matthew who was a tax collector and Paul who was a scholar.

Imagine this in modern terms: a collection of books written over the past 1,400 years (which would take us back to 600AD!) by all sorts of people, from Tudor farmers to saxon warlords, nuclear physicists, doctors and businessmen. It is highly unlikely that such a collection would produce anything close to a unified account.

Despite the large timespan over which it was written, the Bible is completely unvarying in its teaching, maintaining a consistent picture of the nature of God, life after death, monotheism, and many other deep questions.

Even after the Bible was completed, the church began to produce teachings which were at variance with those written. This happened over a matter of only two or three centuries; yet the Bible maintains a unified teaching in every detail over more than fourteen centuries.

Unity and consistency as striking as this could only be produced if there is one mind in control of it all, which arranged the content of all the books. Such a mind would need to be able to span a period of more than a thousand years, work in several languages, and with a huge variety of people. No human mind could possibly have done this.

Explore the Bible's unity of message in more detail: bit.ly/biblethinkunity

Evidence of fulfilled prophecy

The Bible contains many predictions of events which were - at the time they were written down - still in the future. For example, the prophet Isaiah, writing around 700BC, predicted the downfall of the city of Babylon in detail; that it would fade away and become an uninhabited swamp. Babylon rose to become a world power just before 600BC, was overrun by the Persians, and then began a long decline, fading out in the first century AD.

However, the most spectacular predictions are to do with the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Let's have a look at an example:

"And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, [Jesus] said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come where



there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.””

Luke 21:5-6

You can have a look at the parallel accounts of these words from Jesus in **Matthew 24:1-2** and **Mark 13:1-2**. The disciples were admiring the wonderful way the buildings were put together, with huge stones weighing tonnes each. The whole temple was enormous. The prediction of Jesus was not only that the temple would be destroyed, but that it would be destroyed completely, so that not even one stone would be left standing on another.

In 70AD - 40 years after Jesus' prediction and at least a decade since the Gospel writers had finished their books - the Romans sacked the city, and completely destroyed the temple. The enormous platform which it was built on remains, but every one of those huge stones was removed; no part of the walls remains.

Of course, this is just one of many predictions made in the Bible which has since come to pass. Looking back at these helps us trust that what the Bible says, and the prophecies that *haven't* yet happened, will certainly come true.

Explore fulfilled prophecy in more detail: bit.ly/biblethinkprophecy

The important point with all of these pieces of evidence is that the Bible stands alone and can interpret itself - no other book, or tradition, is needed to interpret it.

Lesson summary:

1. The Bible is a message given to mankind by God
2. It is the basis for understanding God
3. The Bible's value and truth is established by objective evidence



Lesson 3 summary questions:

1: Some books are inspired by God - such as the books of the Bible - while others are written by human beings without divine intervention, e.g. Einstein's book 'Relativity'. What is the difference between a book which is inspired, and a book which is not inspired?

2: Here, we're going to go through some steps to explore an undesigned coincidence.

Read **Matthew 8:14-17**

- a) Who does Jesus heal?
- b) What does this tell us about Peter's marital status?

Now read **1 Corinthians 9:5**

- a) What does this tell us about Peter?

Looking at the two passages together:

- a) How do we know the two passages are independent of each other?
- b) Are they consistent in detail?
- c) Is the marital status of Peter an important element of both accounts?
- d) What is it about an undesigned coincidence that makes it important as evidence of reliability?

3: This lesson addresses two different ideas; reliability and inspiration. A book is reliable if it describes events accurately. It is inspired if it comes from God. Of these types of evidence listed below, which are evidence of reliability, and which are evidence of inspiration?

- The witness of Jesus Christ
- Archaeological finds matching the Bible
- The Bible having a unified message across all its writers
- Fulfilled predictions (prophecies)
- Undesigned coincidences